

Against the Grain

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People Profile: JoAnne Sparks

Editor

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ated by an hierarchical approval process. Our “approval” process is quite unique and does not involve the hierarchy to a great extent except to account for senior management as a stakeholder segment.

ATG: *I like your Website at MSKCC and your plasma screen set up. It's so cool. Can you tell us about it?*

JS: The new library Website (<http://library.mskcc.org>) was launched at the end of May 2006 and features *Today's science sparks*, a daily image from one of our own author's publications that links to the fulltext article at the publisher's Website. It is an innovative current awareness and community building feature that is very popular. We are able to feature authors at all stages of their careers, from their first publication to their first article in *Nature*, to the latest collaboration with others around the world. It is very satisfying to “advertise” our own authors on our public Website. Any visitor can go to the abstract of the article and then link through to the full-text if they have a subscription or want to pay-per-view if available at the publisher's site. The plasma screens are part of the **CyberLibrary Café** and feature these same images as well as video and animations from our own authors' publications and lectures.

ATG: *You have worked in several different libraries/environments — Bristol Meyers (corporate, special library), Drexel (academic), and now MSKCC (health, special). Can you tell us what characterizes each? Why is the library important in each? Can you tell us your favorite?*

JS: Yes, I have worked in every kind of library including the local public library when I was in high school! Well, first let me say what I think is consistent across all types of libraries in every setting. All of the libraries I have worked in existed for an end user, someone who would at some point want to access and use the materials provided. So excellent customer service in any setting seems to me to be an important pillar of library services. A key difference in the corporate setting was that there were NO barriers to access. Users could come into the physical library 24/7 and could request anything they needed at any time. Surprisingly, this completely “open access” did not result in overuse of the library or document delivery services. The maximum cost for this premium service was feasible and within reach, even in a non-corporate setting. It was very interesting to me to realize the number of barriers we had in place in all of the other environments where I had worked, as if an individual or department could want “too much information.” In these days of information overload, it almost seems ridiculous now! So, in my current situation, we have removed all such barriers to access. In fact, we moved from a transactional charging model for document delivery and literature searches to an annual allocation with the library absorbing all transactional fees except for unusual custom

against the grain people profile

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BORN & LIVED: Born in Cleveland, Ohio. Lived in Cleveland, Ohio (and Tennessee), Schenectady, NY, Chicago, Philadelphia and now, New Jersey.

FAMILY: Paul, my partner and our dogs (Raymond and Buddha) and our cat (Miles).

EDUCATION: B.A., **Lee College**, Cleveland, Tennessee; M.S.L.S., **Case Western Reserve University**, Cleveland, Ohio.

FIRST JOB: Reference librarian, **Lee College**.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Member of **Medical Library Association, ASIST, ALA and ACM**.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Gardening, reading, travel.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Fear-mongering! The future is bright — we need to embrace it and lead ourselves there!

PHILOSOPHY: Honor the fundamentals — don't just be a slave to fashion!

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Launching our new library Website at **MSK**.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: I hope to have an endowment fund in place for the **MSK Library** that will support the modern library and a mostly virtual collection.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: In five years I think more libraries will have closed, especially where they have not been able to embrace the electronic content model and their users, particularly the younger ones, expect it. I think more publishers will have consolidated, sadly enough, from my point of view. While globalization and consolidation offer many benefits, the loss of individualization and customization is a negative aspect. Having only a handful of STM publishers may, in the short term, provide return on investment for shareholders, but, I think it does not sustain us for the long term. For those librarians, vendors and publishers who are embracing the future, exploiting new technologies and analyzing how these tools can further extend their missions and financial goals, the future is very bright. I definitely think new services for libraries will emerge, new revenue streams for librarians and publishers and new possibilities for collaboration with authors, communities, publishers and librarians. What we call ourselves may even change although I am not quite ready to predict what that will be. Clearly, our roles have to do with making substantive (and sometimes ephemeral) content accessible, findable and lead users to satisfying results. 🐾

requests. To date, we have not had any high volume request that we considered so unusual we could not cover it. So, we have taken the focus off of how much information a user requests and focused it on providing complete access within the requestor's timeframe.

ATG: *You worked with Carol Montgomery at Drexel to cancel most print journal subscriptions, right? Can you tell us how this happened, was it successful, and how many print journal subscriptions you had in the final analysis?*

JS: The experience at **Drexel** was very formative for me in determining my own philosophy for content management. We aggressively moved to eliminate print and add electronic access in a library that had also been neglected for awhile. In the first year we went

from over 1,800 print journal subscriptions to just under 900 print subscriptions. The next year we reduced it further. The goal was to get to a much smaller print journal collection and a greatly expanded electronic collection. Chemists and physicists were very happy with the result which included access to their key titles from their desktops. We also weeded and shifted the entire print book collection. We upgraded the physical infrastructure of the library, added wired and wireless access, laptops for loan, and vastly improved access to workstations and high quality printing. When I arrived at **Drexel**, the library was quiet and underutilized. When I left in 2000, the biggest complaint was noise! It became a center of intellectual life on campus for all kinds of users and a place where students wanted to be. 🐾